From reference desk to help-desk: The effects of technological change on the academic library

Lee Olsen
Easter Institute of Technology
Napier, New Zealand
lolsen@eit.ac.nz

Michael Verhaart
(Supervisor)
Eastern Institute of Technology
Napier, New Zealand
mverhaart@eit.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

This research investigates how technological changes have impacted on academic libraries, with a focus on libraries in the New Zealand ITP sector. Six key technological trends have been identified coupled with strategies that libraries have put in place to meet the demand these trends have put on library services. The focus of this research is to investigate the amount of IT support that is performed by academic librarians, and to consider the prospect of the library reference desk morphing into an IT help-desk.

It is proposed that a New Zealand ITP library be used as a case study to measure the amount of IT support provided to students. This will be done by analysing the library usage statistics from the last five years. Interviews with ITP Library Managers and frontline staff across New Zealand will also be conducted and analysed for common themes and patterns. The research from this paper will inform ITP Library Managers of trends in technology, help with recruitment and for planning of IT support provision.

The author proposes that this research will add value to the Academic Library and IT sector and concludes by suggesting further research is warranted.

Keywords: academic libraries; library science; technological change; IT support

1. OVERVIEW

The academic library and information sector is going through major changes and a lot of these changes are due to technology.

Academic libraries and librarians are continuously reinventing themselves to meet institution and student needs (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015).

LIANZA (2015) states that for libraries to remain relevant they need to lead the way with digital literacy. They need to manage the influx of emergent technologies such as mobile technology, digital resources, cloud computing, Web 2.0 and the online delivery of education, all while bridging the digital divide. Academic libraries have put strategies in place to cope with these changes. One of these strategies is the provision of digital literacy to students by academic librarians.

Figure 1. The poster

The premise of this research is that the support doesn't stop there, that in fact librarians are providing an increasing amount of IT support (log-ins, passwords, printing, Wi-Fi, BYOD and network issues) and that this is changing the nature of the traditional librarian role.

This research investigates the amount of IT support that is provided, and discusses the effects of this change on the academic library and librarian.

2. RESEARCH QUESTON

The primary question the research seeks to address is: "How much IT Support is provided at an academic library in a New Zealand ITP?"

The aim of this research is to examine the effects of technological change on the New Zealand ITP academic library sector with the following objectives:

- Measure the increase in digital and IT support queries in the last five years.
- Identify and measure trends – to identify the changing nature of support.
- Discuss how this impacts on library tasks and roles, staff recruitment and management.
- Develop a list of recommendations for New Zealand ITP Library Managers.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and quantitative approach will be taken to thoroughly analyse and explore the research question to its full potential. A selection of relevant literature, both of recent scholarly articles and industry reports with an IT and library focus will be reviewed.

Case study: In addition to the literature review, a case study of a selected New Zealand ITP library will be conducted. This library has granted access to the library usage statistics from

the last five years to support this research project. The database has been tested, test reports have been run, and the data required is easily accessible.

Interviews: Two questionnaires will be used in the interviews. One for NZ ITP Library Managers, and one for NZ ITP library frontline staff. The interviews are expected to take an hour duration and up to twenty participants will be sought. All ethical considerations have been taken into account in regards to participant participation.

Data analysis: For quantitative purposes the statistical data from the Case Study (library usage statistics) and from the interviews will be analysed to find trends and patterns.

Responses from the interview transcripts will be collated and analysed for common themes and trends.

4. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The research process has been tested against the ITIL theoretical model, Continual Service Improvement (CSI). CSI (see Figure 1.) is a well-known IT service model which can be used to clarify the research, put it into an IT context and ensure it aligns with institutional strategic direction.
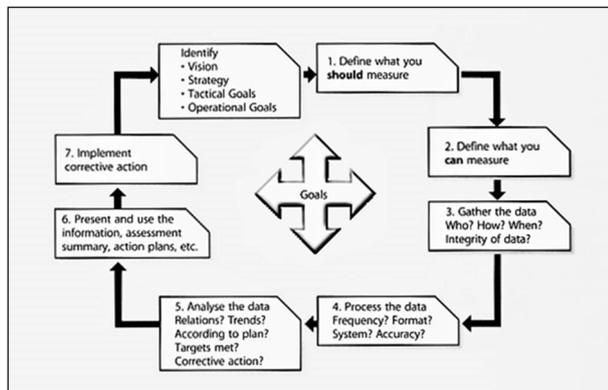

Figure 1. Continual Service Improvement Model (from Hendershott, 2007).

5. CONCLUSION

It is recommended that this project should proceed. While IT in the library sector is a well-researched phenomenon the IT support provided by academic librarians has not been explored in any great depth. There is literature about information and digital literacy but nothing that talks about the IT support required that may eventually lead to academic libraries running hybrid reference / help-desks.

This is valuable information for the New Zealand ITP sector, and particularly for ITP Library Managers for planning IT provision to students.

The result of this study is to provide a document that gives evidence to the tertiary sector of the effects of technological change on libraries and the impact this has had on librarians and the services they provide. Recommendations will be made on how these changes can be managed strategically and in a way that is beneficial to students, staff and the institution as a whole.

6. REFERENCES

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